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ABSTRACT

This paper describes co-teaching as a collaborative, equal relationship between a regular classroom teacher and a special educator which allows for meeting the needs of a greater number of students with disabilities within a single regular classroom program. The co-teaching relationship is thought to develop through a series of three stages: (1) the beginning stage when communication between teachers is stifled or minimal and feelings of discomfort predominate; (2) the developing stage when communication becomes more open and interactive with the rudiments of shared responsibility becoming evident; and (3) the collaborative stage when both educators openly communicate and interact, and teachers and students experience a high degree of comfort. Eight primary components comprising the co-teaching relationship are discussed, including: interpersonal communication, physical arrangement, familiarity with curriculum, curriculum goals and modifications, instructional planning, instructional presentation, behavior management, and grading/evaluation. Strategies are suggested for modifying these components to facilitate movement through the three stages. A rating form to evaluate each of the eight components for co-teaching stage is attached. (DB)

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Developing Positive Co-teaching Environments: Meeting the Needs of an Increasingly Diverse Student Population

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Current initiatives to tighten eligibility requirements for special education, and to improve regular classroom teachers' ability to handle an increasingly, diverse student population within their classrooms, highlight the need for regular and special educators to work together in collaborative partnerships. While a variety of activities (i.e. establishing prereferral teams, instituting special education consultation models, and co-teaching of special and regular educators), have been suggested to implement these initiatives, co-teaching may have a number of advantages over other activities.

Co-teaching is the collaboration between a regular classroom teacher and a special educator for all of the teaching responsibilities of a classroom with students with and without disability. Regardless of how skilled regular classroom teachers become in their ability to accommodate the diverse needs of students with disability, there is a limit to the diversity that any one teacher can be expected to manage by themselves. Because two teachers are present and share responsibilities, co-teaching allows for students with more serve disability to benefit from the regular education program. Co-teaching also allows for a greater number of students with disability to be accommodated within a single regular classroom program.

The constant social interaction and modeling of co-teachers, as they share, cooperate, make jokes, solve problems and make decisions, is an effective technique for teaching the kinds of social skills that are imperative for the full integration of students with disability in the mainstream. This social interaction between two professionals additionally provides increased feelings of worth, renewal, partnership, and collaboration on the part of both regular and special education teachers who practice co-teaching. Because both teachers share equally the responsibilities for all students, co-teaching often is helpful in breaking down barriers between regular and special educators that may inadvertently be built up with more consultative models. Collaborative approaches such as co-teaching, may be a necessary first step in helping some regular classroom teachers avail themselves of prereferral teams, teaching assistance teams and other activities established to help regular classroom teachers learn ways of managing a more diverse student population.

In this article we will first delineate the co-teaching relationship as one that proceeds through levels or stages, developing to a collaborative partnership. This will e followed by the description of eight primary components that comprise the co-teaching relationship. These components include interpersonal communication, physical arrangement, familiarity with curriculum, curriculum goals and modifications, instructional planning, instructional presentation, behavior management and grading/evaluation. Descriptors of each component at each developmental stage will be reviewed.

Levels of the Co-teaching Process

Co-teaching is a developmental process. This means that it develops over time and proceeds through three basic levels or stages. At each level, special and regular educators communicate with varying degrees of interaction or collaboration. At the beginning level the communication tends to be stifled and/or minimal. Both teachers are attempting to establish a professional working relationship, but are experiencing some difficulty. Regular educators may experience feelings of intrusion and invasion. Special educators may be feeling uncomfortable and insignificant. Communication between the two reflects these feelings. As a result it may appear to the outsider that there are actually two classrooms within the one physical space, or that there is an unnecessary adult in the back of the room.

As the relationship between the two teachers develops, the communication becomes more open and interactive. The result is the beginnings of a partnership that benefits all students. At this second level there is an increase in communication and interaction. Both students and teachers feel more comfortable, with the rudiments of shared responsibility evident.

At the third level, special and regular educators openly communicate and interact. The relationship between the two is characterized as mutual and collaborating. Teachers and students experience a high degree of comfort in the classroom.

There are eight components of the co-teaching relationship that contribute to the development of a collaborative learning environment. In the next section, each of these components will be described . Additionally, strategies for moving from one level of the co-teaching relationship to the next will be suggested.

Components of the Co-teaching Relationship

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication forms the cornerstone of the co-teaching relationship. Effective interpersonal communication skills enhance teachers ability to develop other components of the co-teaching relationship. Effective interpersonal communication entails the use of verbal and nonverbal communication skills and social skills. At the beginning level interpersonal communication is characterized by limited and respectful, but distant communication. At this level there may be a clash of teaching styles. As the co-teaching relationship develops, there is increased communication, a give and take of ideas, a respect for different teaching styles, and an increase in the use of humor for communication. Finally, at the collaborative level, teachers model effective communication skills, often developing and using nonverbal signals to communicate ideas. At this level there is a positive presentation of role models that is especially valuable in the case of female/male co-teaching relationships to enhance the development of appropriate social interactions between students.

In order to move to the collaborative level on this components of the co-teaching relationship, teachers need to work on keeping channels of communication open. This can be done by developing and using active listening skills, sending "I" messages when confusion arises, and developing empathy skills. The effective use of nonverbal communication skills also will enhance the development of interpersonal communication.

Physical Arrangement

The physical arrangement of the classroom is a component of the co-teaching relationship that includes the use of space in the classroom, and encompasses the position of materials, students and teachers. The beginning level of the co-teaching relationship is often characterized by separate use of space. There may be little or no special education ownership of space or materials. Sometimes there seems to be invisible "walls" between the space used by the two teachers. As the relationship moves to the developing level, separate territoriality becomes less evident. There is freer movement and positioning of both students and teachers within the classroom. Material and space becomes more shared.

At the collaborating level, students are intentionally interspersed in the classroom for whole group lessons, and work in integrated, small clusters for cooperative learning activities. There is fluid positioning of teachers throughout the classroom. This increases class coverage and support. As one teacher moves toward a specific areas, the other teacher responds by repositioning to another area. There is joint ownership of space between the two teachers.

To enhance the collaborative use of space, special education teachers should first remember to respect the space and territory of regular education teachers. Special educators should resist the temptation to stay in the background, but instead move around the room. This will add visibility. Special educators should offer materials for classroom use and allow them to be permanently housed in the regular classroom.

To increase the integration of students, teachers should assign students "social anchors". Social anchors provide information and support, and are responsible to ensuring that all students understand classroom expectations at all times. Social anchors help to increase the physical and social integration of students with disability.

Familiarity with the Curriculum

Becoming competent and confident with the curriculum of the regular education program is an important component in the co-teaching relationship. Familiarity with the curriculum encompasses a knowledge of the scope and sequence and an understanding of the content of the curriculum. At the beginning level of this component, special education teachers may be unfamiliar with the curriculum and feel little confidence in teaching the curriculum. Regular education teachers may also feel little confidence in special educators' ability to teach the regular curriculum. As the two teachers move toward the collaborative level of this component, both staff and students become confident in special educators' ability to handle the curriculum. As the level of competence and confidence develops, regular education teachers become more willing to modify, share in planning and collaborate in general.

Special education teachers need to take the responsibility for learning the curriculum scope and sequence of the regular education program. They also need to familiarize themselves with materials and methods used by the regular classroom teachers in order to establish credibility with regular education teachers and with the students. While

learning the curriculum, special educators need to remember to defer to the regular educators' expertise regarding the curriculum. As the level of familiarity and confidence with the curriculum grows, special educators may offer to conduct brief cooperative learning activities, mini lessons and small group lessons. Achieving success with small segments of the curriculum will build regular educators' confidence in special educators' abilities.

Curriculum Goals and Modifications

Curriculum goals and modifications involves the mutual planning of the specific goals and modifications that are needed for all students to be successful in the co-teaching lassroom. At the beginning level, there is little mutuality or flexibility for goal setting, or for the development of modifications. Programs may be "text-driven" and goals may be "test-driven". At this level, even simple modifications are nonexistent. At the developing level, there is an increase in awareness of the needs for student-centered goals. At this level, regular education teachers become more willing to implement modifications particularly for students with more severe disability or for those students with low incidence disorders. At the collaborating level, student-centered objectives are incorporated into the classroom curriculum. There is mutual planning of objectives and modifications are are considered regularly.

In order to develop to the collaborative level, it may be helpful for special education teachers to develop lists of objectives for subject matter and with regular education teachers, prioritize the objectives. This helps regular education teachers to key into the idea that all students may not be able to achieve all of the objectives, but can achieve some of the objectives. Developing modified tests, activities, homework assignments and offering their use in the classroom, also is a good way of increasing the acceptance of modifications for students.

Instructional Planning

Instructional planning is the component of co-teaching that involves the day to day, week to week and unit to unit planning of coursework to be offered in the classroom. Common instructional planning time needs to be provided on a daily basis, in order for this component of the co-teaching process to progress to the collaborative level.

At the beginning level of co-teaching, separate curriculums may be

planned and presented with the classroom. Special educators may plan lessons that may or may not be related to the regular classroom lessons. At this level, there is minimal or no communication for planning instruction. As educators move toward the developing level, more time is allotted to common planning. As regular educators become more confident with special educators' competence, responsibility for planning becomes more shared. This mutuality for planning increases at the collaborating level. Now planning is on-going and shared. Both teachers openly communication and share ideas, strategies and the mundane duties of paperwork. There is evidence of spontaneous planning within the classroom , teachers may "mini-caucus" during classtime, redirecting the planned activity to one more beneficial to the students.

Instructional Presentation

The instructional presentation component of the co-teaching relationship involves providing instruction, presenting lessons, and structuring cooperative learning activities. Once more, the theme of separateness occurs at the beginning level. Special educators may provide instruction to small groups or individual students, separate from other students, or regular educators may provide all of the instruction. At this level, regular educators are often perceived as the "boss" and the special educators as the "helper". As the co-teaching relationship moves to the developing level, regular educators begin to share some of the directing of student activity. Special educators may direct small groups of students, or may present mini-lessons or review lessons. However the chalk is still controlled by regular educators.

As the two educators move into the collaborating level, shared responsibility for presenting lesson material is achieved. Students perceive both teachers as competent. The chalk passes freely between the teachers. Active, open communication during lesson presentation is the rule.

To help facilitate the development of this component of the co-teaching relationship, special educators should focus efforts on developing modified outlines, organizational strategies and study skills that may be useful to many students. Offering to present review lessons after the initial presentation is a good way to begin to share in instructional responsibilities. Suggesting the use of cooperative learning groups and then monitoring these groups, is also a way of beginning to share in the instructional presentation of lessons.

Behavior Management

Behavior management is an important component of the co-teaching relationship. Behavior management involves the use of rules, development of classroom expectations and the use of consequences for managing students' behavior. Behavior management also entails to management of transitions.

At the beginning level, there may be two separate systems for behavior management of students. Students with disability may be solely responsible to special educators, while other students may be solely responsible to regular educators. Another characteristic of the beginning level is that regular educators are responsible for all of the aspects of behavior management. As the two teachers move to the developing level, there is more communication and mutual development of rules, routines, expectations and consequences. Special educators may begin to manage classroom transitions. However, there may be little individualization of behavior management planning, with little tolerance for differences in expectations for some students. At the collaborating level, both teachers develop rules and expectations for student behavior. Individualized behavior plans, use of contracts, and tangible rewards and reinforcement become commonplace. Both teachers manage students' behavior and either feels comfortable managing transitions.

In order to develop to the collaborative level, special educators should model positive reinforcement. Special educators should focus on positive behavior, calling attention to it often. It may also be helpful to bring tangible rewards (i.e., stickers, donuts, etc) to class and offer to distribute them for the successful acquisition of specific skills or the completion of assignments. Special educators should post classroom rules and review routines with students. Reminding students of rules, procedures for routines and classroom expectations, should occur often. Any individual behavior management planned developed should be kept simple and special educators should take sole responsibility for implementing such plans. This type of modeling will be helpful in moving toward the collaborative level.

Grading/Evaluation

The grading/evaluation component of co-teaching is a most difficult one to develop. Evaluation is relative. Each classroom teacher tends to

have a unique system for evaluating students. Adjusting standards and expectations for performance to meet individual students' needs, while maintaining course integrity, are essential aspects of this component.

At the beginning level there may be separate grading and evaluation procedures, or regular educators may take all of the responsibility for grading all students. Usually at this level few measures are used to compile students' grades. As teachers move into the developing phase, some modifications are considered for grading and some discussion takes place. The number of measures used to compile grades increases. At this level, regular educators begin to develop an appreciation that modifications in grading are necessary. At the collaborative level, a variety of options are the routine approach for grading. Modifications are considered and implemented effectively. Objectives and subjective standards are included for consideration; many measures are used for compiling grades. Goals and objectives of educational plans are considered.

In order to develop this component of the co-teaching relationship, special educators should stress accountability of assignments. They should keep a record of student attendance, homework handed in on time, homework handed in late, completion of classroom assignments and any other measure that seems appropriate. Special educators should share students' individual educational plans with regular educators and urge them to consider them in grading students. Increasing the number and diversity of measures for grading is an excellent way of moving toward the collaboration level for grading and evaluation.

The Co-teaching Rating Form

The Co-teaching Rating Form can be used by regular and special educators to evaluate the level of their co-teaching relationships on each of the eight components of the co-teaching relationship. They should use the rating form to evaluate whether they are working at a beginning, developing or collaborating level on each component. This evaluation will yield a profile and can be used by co-teachers as a means of measuring progress and movement toward the collaborative level for each of the components. The co-teaching profile can also be used by co-teachers to develop goals and more specific ways that they can enhance their co-teaching relationships. By focussing on specific aspects of the co-teaching relationships that are areas of strength and weakness, it is hope that both regular and special educators will be able to more quickly

develop collaborative relationships with each other. When this occurs, all teachers in classrooms will be able to better meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

Co-Teaching Rating Form